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ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates the means which Russian has to render English where the use of articles if required. The author concentrates on the function of the pronoun, preposition, and adverb which modify the Russian sentence. Numerous examples of English phrases and statements are provided in the target language. (RL)

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SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THE LACK OF A DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLE IN RUSSIAN

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Little or no attention has been paid to the question what means Russian has of compensating for the lack of a definite and indefinite article. The purpose of this note is to consider the question from the point of view of the English speaker concerned with rendering as precisely as possible the various shades of meaning which can be expressed in English by the articles. It is not our intention to examine all the funtions of the English articles; our aim is to concentrate on those functions, the precise translation of which into Russian modifies the syntax of the Russian sentence.

We shall consider first of all the translation into Russian of the English articles by various parts of speech, notably the pronoun, the preposition and the adverb, and we shall begin by examining some of the most important uses of the indefinite article a. Perhaps its most characteristic use is to indicate that a person or object is not unique, but only one specimen of many similar persons or objects. It is not merely indefinite. It has various degrees of indeterminacy. In its most indeterminate sense, a can mean something or other, someone or other, indefinite and unidentified. This meaning may be idiomatically rendered in Russian by the particle -nibud' (or its more formal alternative -libo). Unbegaun[1] writes ". . . the particles -nibud' and -libo indicate a person or object the very existence of which is not certain." This is the precise meaning of a in such sentences as the following: he is looking for a job (he may not find one; there may be no job for him); I hope that we shall soon reach a village (but we may not; there may not be one). The article may therefore be

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exactly rendered by kakoj-nibud': 'on iščet kakuju-nibud' rabotu; ja nadejus', čto my skoro dojdem do kakoj-nibud' derevni.'

In a rather less indeterminate sense a can mean something or other, someone or other, still unidentified but nevertheless in a known state of existence. In this sense the particle -to is the Russian equivalent of a. "The particle -to indicates an existing but unidentified person or object."[2] The distinction between -to and -nibud' in rendering the English indefinite article is clearly brought out by comparing the above sentences with the following: he has found a job, but I do not know what he is doing 'on našel kakuju-to rabotu, no ja ne znaju, čem on zanimaetsja'; we soon came to a village 'my skoro došli do kakoj-to derevni.'

Two meanings may be conveyed by the indefinite article in a sentence like I bought these gloves at a shop in London. The sentence may mean that I do not remember at which shop I bought them, but that I do know it was somewhere in London. It may also mean that I know which shop it was, but that I do not wish to, or have no need to identify it. In the former case it can be translated by kakoj-to: 'ja kupil èti perčatki v kakom-to magazine v Londone' (a definite shop, but I do not know which one). In the latter case it can be translated by odin: 'ja kupil èti perčatki v odnom magazine v Londone' (a certain shop which I know and could identify if I wished). Again, in the sentence I was told that a lady wished to see me, the translation 'mne skazali, čto kakaja-to dama xočet menja videt'' would imply that the person giving the message has no idea who the lady is, while 'mne skazali, čto odna dama xočet menja videt'' implies that the speaker does know, although he does not, as it happens, identify her (a certain lady). Collinson writes "A certain occupies from one point of view an intermediate position between definite and indefinite indication. To the speaker the indication is definite either because he knows the particular item but will not say, or because he at least knows that there is a particular item which fulfils his condition. To him it is a 'provisional demonstrative'. . . To the hearer, a certain is indefinite, for he must at once ask 'which?'"[3]

Odin in this sense of a certain is commonly used in Russian to translate the English indefinite article : an old friend of mine once sent me this pipe (sc. I know who it was) 'odin

moj staryj drug kogda-to poslal mne ètu trubku.' Or again, he was talking about a rich man known to us both 'on govoril ob odnom bogače, izvestnom nam oboim.' But it should be added that the possessive adjective without odin may also correspond to 'a. . . of mine' ('yours,' etc.); the correct translation of Istorija moego sovremennika (Korolenko) is The Story of a Contemporary of Mine and not The Story of My Contemporary.

The indefinite article preceding a proper name is normally translated by kakoj-to or nekij: a Mr. Jones rang you up 'kakoj-to (nekij) g. Džons pozvonil vam po telefonu.' Zagoretskij in Gore ot uma says, "S kakim-to Čackim ja kodga-to byl znakom" I did once know a Čackij. In these examples a qualifies an unidentified person with the surname Jones or Čackij. Odin is not used, precisely because the person is not identified from among all the possible Joneses and Čackijs.

The English indefinite article has many other functions besides denoting degrees of indeterminacy. It may have a weakly numerical sense, in which case it will be translated by odin: in a word 'odnim slovom'; just a moment 'odnu minutu'; Rome was not built in a day 'Rim byl postroen ne v odin den''; all to a man 'vse do odnogo.' It may mean one of: then odin iz, or in some contexts iz, will be an appropriate rendering: the properties of a salt 'svojstva odnoj iz solej' (cf. the properties of salt 'svojstva soli'); he was looking at a Raphael Madonna 'on smotrel na odnu iz Rafaelevyx Madonn'; his mother was an Obolenskij 'ego mat' byla iz Obolenskix.' Again it may mean the same, one and the same, and here too odin is the normal rendering: birds of a feather 'Odnogo polja jagoda (-y), odnim lykom šity.'

English a may have a derogatory sense—some sort of a—and in some contexts a pronoun, and in others an adverb will convey the desired meaning in Russian. The following translations of in a way are taken from Kunin:[4] You know, in a way, Gideon, you were wrong and they were right 'znaete, Gideon, v kakom-to smysle oni byli pravy, a vy net'; it was so easy and in a way so legitimate 'èto bylo tak legko i do izvestnoj stepeni tak zakonno'; that is true in a way 'vy, požaluj, pravy'; she liked him too in a way 'on i ej kak budto nravilsja.'

When a means each or every it will have to be translated into Russian by a preposition. Twice a week (each week)

'dva raza v nedelju'; of a Sunday (every Sunday) 'po voskresen'jam'; two shillings a tin 'po dva šillinga banka.' It will be noticed that in English the definite, as well as the indefinite, article is used distributively with numbers—two shillings the tin being an exact synonym of two shillings a tin.

The exclamtion what a. . . ! is frequently the cue to use čto za in Russian (what an idea! 'čto za ideja!'). It should, however, be emphasised that the indefinite article is no more common than the definite in this exclamatory sense (it's a beautiful town—but the smells! 'èto krasivyj gorod—no čto za zapaxi!'

Finally, before leaving the indefinite article and the extent to which it is rendered in Russian by certain parts of speech, it is worth noting that takoj may often be translated by a when the meaning is one which: e.g., 'sovetskaja promyšlennost' idet na takom urovne, kotoryj na 5 procentov vyše 1951 goda' Soviet industry has reached (is running at) a level which is 5% higher than in 1951. The same pronoun, takoj, on the other hand, is most naturally rendered by the definite article when the meaning is the sort of: 'ja vernulsja s takim čuvstvom, kak budto ja videl ploxoj son' I came back with the feeling that I had had a bad dream.

Turning now to the definite article, we can say that one of its characteristic functions is that of a weak demonstrative pronoun—this or that. Consequently the pronouns ètot or tot will often be needed in Russian, where the English has this weakly demonstrative sense: something of the kind 'čto-to v ètom rode'; at the time I was still a boy 'v èto (to) vremja ja ešče byl mal'čikom.' In these cases, indeed, the may readily be replaced by this or that. But sometimes this substitution is not possible in English, and the use of tot is therefore more surprising, e.g.: the fact that he agreed means nothing 'tot fakt, čto on soglasilsja, ničego ne označaet'; the fact is that he is a fraud 'fakt tot, čto on obmanščik.' A further, idiomatic, use of tot is in the set expression 'i tomu podobnoe' and the like (on the origin and meaning of the article in this expression see P. Christophersen).[5]

The pronoun tot is a very common antecedent to a relative clause in cases where English is content with the definite article: He wanted to do the things which he usually hadn't time to do 'on xotel sdelat' te dela, kotorye obyčno ne uspeval delat''; she was looking in the direction from which the boat

was to come 'ona smotrela v tu storonu, otkuda dolžna byla pojavit'sja lodka.' However, if the relative clause is expressed in Russian by a participle, tot cannot then be used: He walked up to the huge building which extended over a whole block 'on podošel k tomu ogromnomu domu, kotoryj rastjanulsja na celyj kvartal' (finite verb in relative clause), but 'on podošel k ogromnomu domu, rastjanuvšemusja na celyj kvartal' (examples from A. N. Gvozdev).[6]

Another characteristic function of the definite article which cannot be ignored when translating into Russian is that of emphasis. Here, too, the use of a pronoun is called for: Not the Mr. Dickens? 'neuželi tot samyj g. Dikkens?' ('ne tot li samyj g. Dikkens?'); he was one of the first, if not the first 'on byl odnim iz pervyx, esli ne samym pervym.'

In certain classifying contexts (e.g., something of the professor, i.e., something in common with the class of people, professors), a Russian adjective formed from the class noun is often the best translation of English noun plus definite article: there is something of the child about her 'v nej est' čto-to detskoe.'

In a very different context, where the definite article is tied to a comparative adverb and is equivalent to by this much or by that much, the Russian instrumental case of to or čto qualifies the comparative: the more the merrier 'čem bol'še, tem lučše.'

It is interesting to compare English and Russian practice in cognate expressions such as up the (a) hill and uphill, or down the (a) hill and downhill, where the adverb generalises and the article particularises. The difference is conveyed in Russian by the choice of an appropriate preposition: he climbed up the hill 'on podnjalsja na goru'; for several hours he walked up hill 'neskol'ko časov on šel v goru.' Similarly down the hill 's gory' but down hill 'pod goru.' The choice of the preposition v as opposed to na with nouns denoting means of transport can again suggest the difference between the particular and the general—the particular in this context being a given journey in a given vehicle (article) and the general an adverbialised expression denoting travel in a class of vehicle (no article). Compare three boys and their father were travelling in the (a) car 'tri mal'čika s otcom exali v mašine'; travel by car is more convenient than by train 'udobnee ezdit' na mašine, čem na poezde.'

So far we have been dealing with examples where the presence or absence of an article in English has a discernible effect on the Russian rendering of a phrase, involving the use of a part of speech—pronoun, adverb, or preposition. There are, of course, many other cases where there is no compensating mechanism. Whether we say It's Picasso (the man) or it's a Picasso (one of his paintings), Russian will say simply 'èto Pikasso.' Whether we say it happened on Monday (i.e., last Monday), it happened on a Monday (not necessarily the last one) or it happened on the Monday (a particular Monday identifiable by the context), Russian will say 'èto slučilos' v ponedel'nik,' and leave the context to make it clear if a particular Monday is intended. 'Èto ne Stravinskij' will translate both he is not Stravinsky and he is not a Stravinsky; if a Russian wished to be more precise and say he is no longer the Stravinsky of the 1910's he would still probably say 'èto uže ne Stravinskij 1910-x godov.' While there are minor semantic nuances conveyed by the articles in these English examples, it can hardly be said that Russian loses much in precision by not expressing them; and this impression is borne out by an examination of other similar examples not listed here.

Turning now from the parts of speech, we can ask is it ever possible for the precise use of cases to compensate for the lack of an article in Russian. Two possible illustrations come to mind—the parallel use of the partitive genitive and the accusative of nouns signifying a divisible mass, and the use of both accusative and genitive cases after a small group of verbs, notably iskat', prosit', sprašivat', trebovat', ždat', želat', and xotet'. To take the partitive genitive first 'Peredajte mne xleba' pass me some bread indicates that I want some of the substance, bread, i.e., a slice. 'Peredajte mne xleb' pass me the bread, on the other hand, means that I want all the bread to be passed (the plateful, the loaf). The Russian accusative is the equivalent of the article: the Russian genitive is the equivalent of 'zero indication' or the absence of the article. Similarly, "monaxi dali deneg pod bol'šoj rost" (Alexej Tolstoj) would be translated into English by the monks lent money at a big interest, whereas 'voz'mite den'gi kotorye ležat na stole' means take the money lying on the table. Again one can compare 'student otpil piva' the student had a drink of beer with 'čerez minutu on dopil pivo i

ušel' a minute later he drank up the beer and left. The relationship between these and many similar examples is that of the correspondence between zero indication and the partitive genitive on the one hand, and the article and the accusative case on the other.

The second context in which there appears to be a connection between the articles in English and the choice of case in Russian is that of a noun governed by one of the verbs listed in the previous paragraph (to seek, to ask, to demand, to await, to desire, to wish). It frequently happens that when the noun object in such a context is inanimate the use of the article in English (whether definite or indefinite) is the cue to use the accusative case in Russian, while the absence of the article in English frequently calls for a genitive in Russian. The general principle with these verbs is for an accusative case to follow them if the object is individualised or particularised (most commonly concrete objects, which are much more readily particularised than abstract nouns), and for a genitive case to follow if the object, although concrete, is used figuratively. For example: he is looking for the brief case he has lost 'on iščet poterjannyj portfel''; she asked for an entry visa for the U.S.S.R. 'ona poprosila vizu na v''ezd v S.S.S.R.'; much excited by your news and eagerly await the manuscript "očen' vzvolnovan vašim soobščeniem i ždu rukopis' neterpelivo" (Gor'kij): conversely to ask for advice 'sprašivat' soveta'; to expect mercy 'ždat' poščady'; to demand accuracy 'trebovat' točnosti.' At first sight there seems to be an identification between positive indication (the articles) and the accusative case on the one hand, and zero indication (absence of the articles) and the genitive on the other. But this correspondence, although it holds good in a great many instances, is an unreal one in so far as abstract nouns in English which in the given context appear in the genitive in Russian may themselves be qualified by articles: to ask for an explanation 'trebovat' ob''jasnenija'; to look for an opportunity 'iskat' slučaja.'

If the choice of cases provides little material that is relevant, word order may be a more fruitful field of study, for, to a limited extent, the comparative freedom of Russian word order makes it possible to convey certain definite and indefinite shades of meaning, which is one of the important functions of the English articles. By altering the position of

the noun subject in a Russian sentence, an effect can be achieved which is the same as that achieved by substituting one article for the other in English. The difficulty is, however, that we cannot say that the subject normally precedes the verb in a Russian sentence. It depends on the verb. With the majority of verbs it is normal for the subject to precede; but with certain types of verbs the reverse is true.

To take first the case where the verb normally follows the noun subject of the sentence, here inversion of the normal order can correspond to the replacement of the definite by the indefinite article in English. This is especially true when the noun refers to a person or thing which is mentioned for the first time (indefinite article). To mention it a second time is already to give it the status of something known (definite article). For example: "Priexala iz goroda staršaja sestra k men'šej v derevnju. Staršaja za kupcom byla v gorode, a men'šaja za mužikom v derevne." (L. N. Tolstoj.) An elder sister came from town to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder sister was married to a merchant in the town, the younger to a peasant in the country. Or again: "V polovine dvenadcatogo s severo-zapada, so storony derevni Čmarovki, v Stargorod vošel molodoj čelovek let dvadcati vos'mi. Za nim bežal besprizornyj. . . Molodoj čelovek vynul iz karmana nagretoe jabloko i podal ego besprizornomy. . . At half-past eleven a young man of about 28 entered Stargorod from the north-west, from the direction of the village of Čmarovka. A waif ran after him . . . The young man took a warm apple out of his pocket and gave it to the waif. (Il'f and Petrov.)

With verbs which normally precede the noun subject of a sentence, inversion can have the same result. Common verbs of this sort are those denoting being, existing, coming into existence, passing out of existence (byt', byvat', nastavat', nastupat', proxodit': e.g., 'prošlo sto let' a hundred years passed). When this normal (inverted) order is itself inverted, and the verb follows the noun, the same degree of individualisation can be achieved as is achieved by the definite article in English: "oni tverdili 'do skoroj vstreči, do skoroj vstreči. . . i vot vstreča nastupila" (Fedin) They kept on repeating 'till we meet again soon, till we meet again soon' (lit. 'to a speedy meeting') . . . and now the meeting had come.

Another group of verbs with a common meaning of begin, or arise (e.g., proisxodit', vspyxivat', voznikat', razygryvat'sja

razdavat'sja, razgorat'sja) also normally precede the noun subject. Thus 'proizošel nesčastnyj slučaj' an accident occurred; 'vspyxnul požar' a fire broke out. It the noun subject precedes these verbs it is often because it is strongly individualised, and a comparison with the English definite article is again possible. For example: "s polunoči podnjalas' burja, no poutru rano korabl' uže minoval Lido. V tečenie dnja burja razygralas' s strašnoj siloj. . ." (Turgenev.) At midnight a storm arose, but by early morning the ship had already passed the Lido. During the day the storm burst forth with terrible violence. . . Compare also 'razrazilas' groza, zagremel grom' a storm broke out, it began to thunder with 'groza razrazilas', kogda my šli domoj' the thunderstorm broke as we were walking home.

It may be possible to establish some further correspondence between the English articles and Russian word-order by examining the position of the noun complement in relation to the subject in sentences containing the verbs to be, to become, to prove to be, and cognate verbs (e.g., stanovit'sja, delat'sja, sčitat'sja, kazat'sja, okazyvat'sja). If we translate the sentence The colonel turned out to be a traitor, the natural word order in Russian will be 'polkovnik okazalsja izmennikom,' with the predicate following the verb. Similarly the traitor turned out to be a colonel, 'izmennik okazalsja polkovnikom.' If, on the other hand, the Russian word-order is reversed, with the predicate preceding the verb, the sentence 'izmennikom okazalsja polkovnik' would correspond most naturally to the meaning the traitor turned out to be the colonel, or alternatively, the colonel turned out to be the traitor (it was the colonel who turned out to be the traitor) and would presuppose a context where treachery has already been referred to. It is in fact only within the broader context in which a sentence is placed that the significance of word order in a given sentence can be properly understood. Considerable research will have to be done before any generalisations can be drawn from examples such as the above, and in any case only tendencies, not rules, could be established. Nevertheless the problem clearly deserves investigation.

The semantic implications of the presence or absence of the article in English verb-noun combinations are of vital importance for the purpose of correct translation into Russian. The three following examples illustrate three aspects of the

question. In all cases the combination verb-article-noun is contrasted with the combination verb-noun, where the verb and noun are identical.

First—to catch a cold and to catch cold. There is virtually no difference in meaning between these expressions in English and they could both be equally well translated by either 'sxvatit' prostudu' or 'prostudit'sja.' It should be said in passing that within the context of a sentence they are not necessarily interchangeable. If we wish to translate he caught a cold from me (we do not say he caught cold from me) we shall not be able to say 'on sxvatil prostudu ot menja' or 'on prostudilsja ot menja': the best equivalent in Russian might be 'on zarazilsja ot menja nasmorkom.' The point, however, is that the presence or absence of the article in this particular verb-noun combination is of no real semantic significance. Secondly—to shut up the shop and to shut up shop. Here the definite article particularises, whereas zero indication, or the absence of an article, generalises, and by extension creates a new idiom. While this idiom may be rendered by the literal translation 'zakryt' lavočku' in quotation marks, it will be more appropriate to paraphrase than to translate, using in turn an idiomatic Russian equivalant such as 'svernut' delo.' Thirdly—to leave the school and to leave school. In this, and many similar examples, the verbs are homonyms and the concealed difference of meaning in English has to be brought out by the use of the appropriate verb in Russian—'ujti iz školy,' 'okončit' školu.'

A further possible verb-article-noun combination is that involving the definite article on the one hand and the indefinite article on the other, both verb and noun again being identical. To have the nerve 'imet' mužestvo' is obviously very different from to have a nerve 'naxal'ničat'.' Examples of this sort, however, present no difficulties to the translator in view of the radical change of meaning involved.

We have not so far considered the articles in combination with adjectives and nouns. A final example may illustrate an interesting correspondence between English a whole, the whole and Russian celyj and ves'. Often celyj and ves' are interchangeable in Russian. But when a whole means a considerable, a very big. . . , only celyj and not ves' may be used. For example, The first Russian revolution represents a whole

historical period in the development of our country 'pervaja russkaja revoljucija predstavljaet celuju istoričeskuju polosu v razvitii našej strany' (Short Course of the History of the CPSU [B]). In a different context, there is a subtle distinction between celyj a whole and ves' the whole in the following sentences: I lived a whole year in Moscow 'ja prožil celyj god v Moskve' (not any one year in particular); I lived the whole year in Moscow 'ja prožil ves' god v Moskve' (a particular year, the year in question).

It is not possible here to consider all the implications of the lack of articles in Russian. We have concentrated on certain grammatical and lexical features—the parts of speech, the cases, word order, and the choice of words—which are all to some extent relevant to the problem of the translation of the English articles into Russian. The material presented may, it is hoped, provide a basis for further investigation.

Notes

1. B. O. Unbegaun, Russian Grammar (Oxford, 1957), p. 130.

2. Unbegaun, p. 130.

3. W. E. Collinson, Indication (Supplement to Language, Baltimore, 1937), p. 29.

4. A. V. Kunin, Anglo-russki frazeologicheskii slovar' (Moskva, 1955), p. 1172.

5. P. Christophersen, The Articles (Copenhagen, 1939), pp. 117-120.

6. A. N. Gvozdev, Ocherk: Po stilistike russkogo yazyka (2nd ed., Moskva, 1955), p. 182.

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